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## John Buchan's Short Stories of Empire: The Indian Protagonist of 'A Lucid Interval' (1910)

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### *Abstract*

John Buchan was a noted novelist of Empire, yet his short stories on Imperial subjects and settings have rarely received critical attention. A careful reading of his shorter fiction reveals an alternative commentary on Empire that has been ignored. The works discussed problematize the common assumption that Buchan's views on Empire in his fiction are Victorian, by showing that he replaced the nineteenth-century model of Imperial rule by military force with the importance of the administrator and the knowledgeable man on the ground. The first part of this essay will survey Buchan's trajectory as a writer of Empire, in fiction and journalism, and discuss two key Edwardian short stories, 'The Kings of Orion' (1906) and 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' (1910), to illustrate how Buchan used Imperial themes to advocate the benefits of colonial rule.

An extended analysis of Buchan's short story 'A Lucid Interval' (1910) and its publishing, political and social history forms the second part of the essay, since this story offers an unusual insight into the complexity of British imperial ideology in the early twentieth century. Buchan's political narrative uses the then common assumption of racial superiority to engage with complex ideas about the ethics of state politics and the feudal relationships that Imperialism promoted. It is his only attempt to write from the perspective of a non-white character, deploying the Indian Ram Singh's legitimate objections to make a party-political point against Liberalism in favour of Imperialist Conservatism. The story associates 'civilisation' with Imperial values, making anti-Imperialist thinking a form of anarchism. Its plot enacts anarchist views in the heart of the political establishment, to show their effect on the Imperial project as a whole. 'A Lucid Interval' is read as an investigation into the ethics of Imperial politics, and the essentially feudal basis for Imperial power relationships, today one of the principal objections to Imperialism as a system of governance. Buchan's use of humour undercuts the extremes of ideological arrogance that he assigns to the politicians. They utter expressions of their own power and position without truly comprehending what they are saying.

The first part of this essay examines how John Buchan (1875-1940) wrote imperial fiction, which he largely did before the First World War in the first part of his writing career. He did this in different texts and forms: the short stories 'The Far Islands' (1899), 'The Kings of Orion' (1906), 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' (1910a), 'A Lucid Interval' (1910b) and 'The Green Wildebeest' (1927); the novels *The Half-Hearted* (1900), *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), *Prester John* (1910); in political

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analysis in *The African Colony* (1903); and in journalism, in 'An Imperial Club for London' (1903). The second part of the essay will analyse 'A Lucid Interval', with pedagogical material on its publishing and metahistory.

'A Lucid Interval' is an example of how politically committed British writers of the Edwardian period like Buchan used short fiction to stage sophisticated political critique. It shows the centrality of imperialism to Buchan's political vision when this was not really shared by much of the general public (Porter 2004: 253). It is important to understand how Buchan's formal political statements in this highly entertaining story of doctored curry undercut ideological arrogance and also reaffirm the importance of the right kind of politics, in this case politics that fulfilled an Imperial vision.

The scale of Buchan's literary output makes him a notable novelist of Empire by quantity. Schwarz observes that the principal trope found in most of Buchan's novels and short stories, 'the line dividing sanity from insanity' and civilisation from anarchy, was 'not determined, for him, by party politics but by the perceived requirements of the British state and, closely interconnected, by the complex of lived experience and affiliations encoded in the dynamics of ethnic belonging' (Schwarz 1997: 90). As we will see, in 'A Lucid Interval' Buchan argues that the British Empire was the only alternative to a state of anarchic self-rule. Buchan was a former Imperial administrator with no military experience, so his literary response to Empire is naturally focused on the power of the civil servant. 'A Lucid Interval' is one of several Imperial short stories in which Buchan privileges a technocratic perspective on empire rather than valorising militarism. In this Buchan was following Victorian Imperial writers, such as Kipling, who justified the acquisition of knowledge by writing about it in the pages of *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Blackwood's Magazine* and other Victorian periodicals with sizeable colonial, civil service and military readerships (Appendix, item 1). Kipling's Kim goes into the Survey; he does not go into the army.

Buchan's writing, as Hermann Wittenberg notices, is deeply 'invested in the flows of knowledge, power and opposition that course through the capillaries of Britain's empire' (Wittenberg 2006: 3). By studying 'A Lucid Interval' we can read the narrative of Imperial governance from the perspective of the peoples being governed. The story also separates the narrative voice from characters who opposed

Imperialism (a classic Buchan technique of disassociation), and changes the English aristocracy of politics into an imaginary empire in which everyone—even Indian men and white women—can participate. Stylistic effects and an economy of narrative express Buchan's Imperialism, highlighted by his careful use of ridicule. For example, the potential of anarchy on an Imperial scale is distilled into two Mayfair dinner parties separated by a fortnight of public political chaos. Less ridiculous, but still satirical, Ram Singh hopes to uphold his authority as a feudal landowner by a highly symbolic journey across the seas to lay his case at the feet of the King-Emperor (whom, of course, he never sees, since the business of Empire is entirely conducted by Edward VII's underlings) (Appendix, items 2 and 3). This magnificent gesture of feudal dignity is undercut by the alarming possibility of the loss of his own dependant tenants by the whim of Imperial politics. Buchan creates in miniature here the Imperial problem: how to govern when one relies on those governed to maintain one's rights to govern them.

This reduction of scale is a not unfamiliar pattern in Buchan's fiction overall. His protagonists represent their class, their country and their politics in a private arena that shows the reader how their own world operates. This, in part, is a reason for Buchan's enduring popularity: he told stories that every reader could identify with. His highly skilled storytelling shows stylistic and aesthetic achievements which are the results of technical skill.

Buchan first began publishing his essays and short stories during the Scottish *fin de siècle*, writing in a cultural context of Aestheticism and muscular Christianity, and immersed in Scottish Presbyterian sensibilities and history (Appendix, items 4 and 5). The post-Impressionist aesthetics that so strongly influenced the Glasgow Art Nouveau artist and architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, only seven years his senior, were an important influence on Buchan while a student. This can be seen in the bindings of his early books (Appendix, item 6), and was evident in his family's home where his sister insisted on 'plain cream wallpaper, printed linen covers, low bookshelves and Arundel prints' (Adam Smith 1985: 45). Buchan's main literary models in his formative years as a young writer in the early 1890s were Sir Walter Scott and Neil Munro (Appendix, items 7 and 8), and his prose style derived from his classical education and the seventeenth-century rhythms of the Authorised Version of the Bible that Buchan heard his father

preaching as a Church of Scotland minister. When he moved to Oxford in 1895 he published stories in the radical literary magazine *The Yellow Book* in 1896; Appendix, item 9) and became a publisher's reader for the avant-garde publisher John Lane and The Bodley Head. These associations increased a tension in his writing, tugging between philosophical Aestheticism and the existential testing of the hero out of doors. His writing in this period was of two types: it is either historical and ruggedly Scottish, or about modern (Edwardian) characters who dwell in Imperial drawing-rooms after service in the wilder parts of the Empire. Buchan dabbled briefly with the Arnoldian conceit of the Scholar-Gypsy, but his version of this figure was an austere Scholar rather than a louche Gypsy (Buchan 1894).

In 1901, fresh from Oxford and studying to be a barrister, Buchan began work in South Africa as a civil servant in Lord Milner's cabinet, called the 'Kindergarten', many of whose members went on to have influential political careers. Tasked with helping to administer the Empire's policies on land reform and re-allocation, he gained solid first-hand experience as an Imperial administrator and travelled widely in southern Africa for two years. On his return to Britain he wrote for *The Spectator*, pursuing his goal of becoming a man of letters. In 1907 he became the London-based literary advisor for the Edinburgh publishing house Thomas Nelson & Son (Appendix, item 10). Buchan continued to work for Nelson's until 1918, became a director during the War, during which time he was also evolving into a journalist, war historian and pundit. He eventually joined the War Office, and then the Department of Information in 1917 as its head. By that date he had also achieved best-selling status as a novelist, with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and *Greenmantle* (1916), so his future career was assured as a novelist. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was his twenty-seventh book, published twenty-two years after his first essay appeared in print.

Although he had been raised on the classic Victorian three-decker novel, Buchan's first books of the *fin de siècle* were modern 'slim volumes' suitable for the pocket on an all-day walking tour. He also wrote for the new periodicals market. His first ten essays and short stories came out in 1893-94, mostly in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and *Macmillan's Magazine* (Appendix, item 1). These magazines had long Victorian histories, and were responding with vigour to Edwardian changes in modern publishing (Macdonald 2010, 45). For the next fifteen

years Buchan's fiction and essays would appear in other Victorian giants such as *Chambers' Magazine* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, and with the American magazines *The Living Age* and *The Atlantic Monthly* (Appendix, items 11 & 12). His journalism appeared mainly in the Conservative weekly newspaper *The Spectator*, for whom he served as a reviewer and deputy editor.

Thus Buchan's initial readers were the soldiers and administrators of Empire, and their families. He was good at self-marketing, and ensured that first his essays and then his short fiction was reprinted in book form at regular intervals. Readers who did not browse the ponderous Victorian monthlies would have encountered his short stories in the collections *Scholar Gipsies* (1896), *Grey Weather* (1899), *The Watcher by the Threshold* (1902), *Some Eighteenth-Century Byways* (1908) and *The Moon Endureth* (1912). Buchan's secondary readership was therefore to be found in the solidly middle-class professions, among people who could afford to buy his slim volumes and had read him in their monthly reviews, and among auto-didactic clerkly readers. His more universal fame among all classes of readers did not arrive until after his invention of Richard Hannay in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915). To some extent he achieved a foretaste of this with his first full-length Imperial novel, *Prester John* (1910), which came out two months after 'A Lucid Interval', serialised largely at Buchan's own instigation in the aggressively patriotic boys' magazine *The Captain* (Macdonald 2010: 33-34). After the war Buchan placed stories in the new post-war fiction periodicals, *Adventure*, *The London Magazine*, the *New Magazine* and the *London Pall Mall Magazine*, but he never appeared in the hugely popular *The Strand Magazine* or *Windsor Magazine*.

A careful reading of Buchan's shorter fiction reveals an alternative commentary on Empire that has been ignored. These works problematize the common assumption that Buchan's views on Empire in his fiction are Victorian, by showing that he replaced the nineteenth-century model of Imperial rule by military force with the importance of the administrator and the knowledgeable man on the ground. Juanita Kruse describes Buchan as a transitional figure in the writing of the British Empire: 'far less violent than older men like Rider Haggard and G. A. Henty, but never willing entirely to renounce the use of force for imperial defense as were younger men like John Galsworthy and E. M. Forster' (Kruse 1989: 19). Buchan's fiction was strong on a nation's right to take and occupy

the land of others by its greater knowledge of the rights of ownership, representing Imperialism as a project of (western) knowledge equalling ownership, a typical contemporary stance held by other Empire writers. As an Imperial administrator in South Africa with a strongly intellectual approach to the law and politics of land re-allocation policy, Buchan reworked Kipling's narrative of Empire in his own fiction to reduce the importance of military rule and leadership, and advance the rights of ownership through administrative competence and understanding. The motif of the experienced colonial administrator on the ground being the man with the most right to authority appears often in his Empire fiction, as it does in a more general sense by his valorisation of the specialist and the 'expert friend'. In this sense, Kruse's observation about the transitional qualities of Buchan's fiction is borne out, by noticing that Buchan's Empire fiction advocates modern Imperialism based on sound and knowledgeable administration, rather than on Victorian militarism.

Buchan's first source of Empire knowledge would have been Kipling's short stories, and the colonial and military fiction and articles in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Buchan's short story 'The Far Islands' (1899) clearly draws on Kipling's 'The Brushwood Boy' (1895), reprinted in *The Day's Work* in 1898. Both stories share the recurring dreams of a schoolboy who becomes a young army officer. Both stories stress the importance of the public school experience and the army in forming the right kind of Imperial servant, code for a good and honourable man.

In Buchan's earliest fiction his heroic causes had been resistance to Covenanting fanaticism, and adherence to the Jacobite Uprising, using both to depict the Christian message of personal sacrifice for a greater good. In *The Half-Hearted* (1900) Buchan would use the idealisation of death in service to develop his motif of unsung acts of heroism performed for the sake of others by turning the heroic cause into loyalty to the British Empire. The lone man defending the Empire against overwhelming odds (often another Empire) can be seen, for example, in Buchan's novels *Greenmantle* (1916), and *A Prince of the Captivity* (1933), and in his short story 'The Lemnian' (1911). This motif accentuates the theme of the thinness of the line between civilisation and anarchy, by placing Imperial values and loyalties on that line, to hold back the hordes who oppose them. The collocation of civilisation with Imperial values makes anti-Imperialist thinking a form of anarchism, dangerously destructive, and inimical to modern society.



Buchan's 1903 study of African history and policy, *The African Colony*, describes his travels in South Africa, his understanding of the history of southern Africa's occupation, and the politics of the Boer Wars. Buchan's firm commitment to Africa's future as part of the Empire is also reflected in his *Spectator* article 'An Imperial Club for London' (14 November 1903). In it, Buchan makes a semi-serious case for a London clubhouse in which the (white) men of the British Empire will be able to foregather, since the Empire's (white) women already have their own Victoria Club (Appendix, item 13). Buchan appears to argue for such an establishment on democratic grounds, to cater for (some of) those Colonials who would not be acceptable in London clubs: 'In the Colonies clubs are more democratic than at home, and such an arrangement would provide for all the better classes in any Colonial community' (Buchan 1903: 803). More importantly, I think, this article indicates that in 1903 Buchan was keenly interested in bringing selected supporters of Empire together, upholding class and sex boundaries but also extending admission to British, 'home' Imperial circles to those occupying the same social strata in the wider Empire. Roger Clarke has noted how such supporters might have felt the need for strength in unity at this time: 'various schemes which were being discussed at the time to improve the organisation of the Empire in the light of both the weaknesses which had been exposed by Britain's military difficulties during the Boer War and the wave of anti-imperialist sentiment which the war had generated' (Clarke 2015: 32). Buchan's article clearly sets out the thinking that would inform his pseudonymous fictionalised symposium *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), by its plea for all good men (and women) of Empire to be in unity behind their shared Imperial ideology.

Stephen Donovan has described *A Lodge in the Wilderness* as 'a novel of ideas', one of the 'unique literary responses to a deepening imperial crisis at the start of the new century' (Donovan 2013a: xxi, x). Because it is an obscure *roman-à-clef* drawing heavily on Buchan's admiration for Cecil Rhodes, and not an adventure or a romance, *A Lodge* is now little known or read, yet in the context of Edwardian imperialism it is an important text, offering an insider's views of contemporary Imperial advocates and opponents, and a critique of British Imperial policies. T. J. Couzens shows how Buchan's admiration for the South African landscape was influenced by contemporary Imperial land

settlement policy, and the recent history of indigenous uprisings (Couzens 1981: 9-14; also echoed in Rich 1986: 55-56). In concert with Buchan's 1903 proposal in 'An Imperial Club', Couzens considers that 'Buchan's ideal [of Imperialism] is a kind of Club, a small elite ruling over Uncle Tom's Lodge, fine imperialists, who are more guided by patriotism than private gain' (Couzens 1981: 19).

The fear of an indigenous uprising is the catalyst for action in a contrasting short story also published in 1906, 'The Kings of Orion', which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January. This short story makes robust statements about Empire, focalised through an Imperial narrative voice in an invented East African colonial setting. It is important to note how the story's deliberately nested narrative structure serves to separate Buchan the author from the views and personality of Thirlstone, his second narrative character, who may well be a caricature of Military Secretaries whom Buchan had encountered in Africa. Thirlstone is stuffy, ex-public school and ex-Army. Increasing his unreliability as a narrative voice, he also displays repellent anti-Semitism as he tells his story to the main narrator. This unnamed man's presence filters Thirlstone's views to the reader, the voice of reason in contrast to Thirlstone's unreasonable bigotry, typical for the period and culture though it was. The story valorises the upholding of the Empire and its values even in the most remote and dangerous circumstances, and punishes those who try to exploit those peoples under the Empire's protection. It is a paternalistic vision, told in a densely allusive style, with impeccable pacing and comic impact. We can see in this story again the importance of the man on the spot and the man who is a local expert, as Imperial experts. The Imperial project is vindicated by the strong performativity of its power enacted in the events of the story. It is also strongly associated with the problem of Thirlstone's anti-Semitism, which modern-day thinking cannot accept in our own time, but needs to recognise as a historical fact for the period of and in which Buchan was writing.

The plot of Buchan's first commercial success, *Prester John* (1910), relies on the reader accepting the white man's duty to trade with, protect and police the black Africans who are the Empire's responsibility, and their greatest threat. It has attracted a large amount of critical commentary, and is widely known as Buchan's 'Empire novel' (Daniell 1994: xii). Keeping in mind Couzens' point about Buchan's Imperialism

in *A Lodge* as a preference for patriotism over private gain, we notice that, some four years later, the hero of *Prester John* is in East Africa to trade, and he makes his fortune by confiscating the ancestral treasure that inspired a black tribal uprising against white rule. Maintaining the settlers' trading rights was a moral as well as an Imperial duty. For Schwarz, *Prester John*, as a novel of economic Imperialism, offers a tale of rejuvenation and purpose at the Empire's borders (Schwarz 1997: 92), yet this view has been complicated by Hermann Wittenberg, who observes that the purpose of such rejuvenating activity was to 'contain and manage the racial dangers of the border, clearing a space for the emergence of a new and virile Englishness that could triumphantly assert its presence in the colonies' (Wittenberg 2006: 5).

Buchan's story 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' (1910a) focuses on the dangers and responsibilities of clearing such a space. He uses the supernatural, a mode in which he was an expert, to show the importance of constant vigilance on the Empire's borders. It is a story of Imperial revenge against supernatural attack on white colonisation and appropriation, creating what Schwarz calls 'a psychic split' (Schwarz 1997: 103) between the colonising civilised white man in thrall to an alien spiritual force. Juanita Kruse, on the other hand, describes approvingly how this story 'movingly depicts the natural beauty of pagan ritual', and how Buchan 'clearly suggest[s] that civilisation might destroy much that was good and beautiful' (Kruse 1989: 64, 65). Kruse takes the white perspective by asserting that 'civilisation' was not native or black, although the locus of the supernatural force in the story is both beautiful and sophisticated.

Hermann Wittenberg has proposed that this story represents a progression in Buchan's Empire thinking. Where *A Lodge in the Wilderness* had copied Cecil Rhodes's ideas without deviation, 'The Grove' appears to reject such colonial appropriation and domination (Wittenberg 2006: 39: see also Appendix, item 14). For Wittenberg, the story depicts the colonising presence as a nadir of decadence (Wittenberg 2006: 49). While there is much to be found in this richly layered story about appropriation and revenge, and the enforced dominance of Christianity over paganism, the lexicon of Imperial ideology is almost absent from novel, which represents a stage beyond the Empire-building depicted in *Prester John*. Buchan shows here a dream of colonial perfection, in which there are no black Africans to complicate the new

owner's life with prior land claims. Even the workers on the estate who destroy the sacred tower are imported 'young farmers from home', while the otherwise absent 'Kaffirs' "will no' gang [i.e. go] near the place" (Buchan 1910a: 218-9). 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' is a parable of colonisation without political repercussions or consequences. The focus on destroying indigenous architecture suggests that although Buchan's narrator made derogatory remarks about Zimbabwe as a civilisation (Donovan 2013b), Buchan himself may have been ambivalent about southern Africa's most ancient artefacts as evidence of pre-colonial ownership of and right to the land.

Some of these ideas appear again in Buchan's much later short story, 'The Green Wildebeest' (1927), in which he tells an adventure from the early life of his hugely popular Rhodesian / South African character Richard Hannay, developing Hannay's character retrospectively with remarks about Boer psychology and southern African history. Schwarz's observation of the 'oscillating' qualities of whiteness for the Boer in British colonial fiction is manifestly true for this story's character, Andrew Du Preez. He is partly of black African ancestry, over-educated for his station in life as a backwoods farmer, and an immature and highly culpable colonial aggressor, whom Buchan compares unfavourably with the decent, experienced, and racially 'pure' Hannay (Schwarz 1997: 77).

I want to pause at this point to review the tropes that we have seen in Buchan's writing on Imperialism. Empire and Imperialism, for Buchan, are determined not by party politics but by the perceived requirements of the British state as a whole. Casting Imperialism as a project in which (western) knowledge equals ownership, his fiction advances the rights of ownership by extolling the desirability of administrative competence and local understanding, and thus he advocates modern Imperialism as being best based on sound and knowledgeable administration, rather than on Victorian military glamour: 'For Buchan the British Empire represented a way of establishing a necessary and desirable order within a chaotic modern world' (Macdonald and Waddell, 2013: 5). Indeed, his association of civilisation with Imperial values implies that anti-Imperialist thinking is a form of anarchism. Additionally, Buchan develops a theme of nation-building through Empire, by clearing a space—physical as well as metaphorical—for the emergence of a new and virile Englishness based upon sound administrative principles. His parables of colonisation favour those without political repercussions, yet

he follows the traditional Imperial line of appropriation, and the enforcement of Christian dominance over paganism.



Buchan's short story 'A Lucid Interval' (1910) differs significantly from his other Imperial fiction. Uniquely, it features a non-white protagonist: Ram Singh, a landowner on the India-Nepal border, who takes his claim for justice from the colonial law courts to the British Parliament and the Crown.<sup>1</sup> Buchan would not write from the perspective of a non-white character again until he created his Canadian First Nation character Negog in *The Long Traverse / Lake of Gold* (1941). This indicates how rare it was for him to create a narrative focus without access to Imperial power, and how important 'A Lucid Interval' is in his writing of Empire. Its treatment of the Imperial theme draws on Indian colonial history, rather than from the white experience in Africa, yet, because of the dominant role that Ram Singh has in the plot, this story is not simply an emulation of Kipling (whom Buchan had already attempted to mimic in *The Half-Hearted*). Rather, 'A Lucid Interval' offers an unusual insight into the complexity of British imperial ideology in the early twentieth century. The political narrative is not merely about racial superiority, it engages with complex ideas about the ethics of state politics and the feudal relationships promoted by Imperialism.

'A Lucid Interval' was first published in February 1910 in *Blackwood's Magazine*, which was by then maintaining 'a dull existence as the favoured journal of a predominantly military and colonial service audience [...] reflecting the static, diffuse nature of contemporary Edwardian literary and cultural tastes' (Finkelstein 1998: 92-93). The story was also published simultaneously as 'God's Providence' in the US fiction magazine *Atlantic Monthly*. It was the lead story in that issue of *Blackwood's*, where it was followed by an essay on Sir Walter Scott, a survey of aviation activity in 1909, an episode of Neil Munro's serial

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the Indian protagonist, Ram Singh, may have been drawn from Frank Richards' creation of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in his Billy Bunter stories in *The Magnet*. This character first appeared in 1908, and while it is not known if Buchan had been a *Magnet* reader, the reading choices of his younger brother Alastair (aged fourteen in 1910) may have influenced the name of Buchan's character.

*Fancy Farm* (1910) (in which a laird attempts to run his estate on egalitarian principles, a metaphor for the failure of anti-Imperialism), a biographical essay by Andrew Lang on the eighteenth-century actress Betty Barnes and the failings of dramatists of the period, the memoirs of a noted Victorian civil servant, a short story about stalking game in Scotland, an essay on hunting wild pig and crocodile in Muttra, and an anonymous essay on the working man and his vote. 'A Lucid Interval' is thus positioned largely amongst writing about nostalgia and the lives of the upper classes, bearing out David Finkelstein's observation that 'as the empire faded, *Blackwood's Magazine* was left behind to rely increasingly on tales of hunting, shooting and fishing to fill its pages' (Finkelstein 1998: 92).

'A Lucid Interval' begins by explaining how the Indian landowner Ram Singh objects to a ruling in a land arbitration case that was not in his favour, and he sails for London 'to petition the Crown' (Buchan 1910b: 60). He is dismissed by the Liberal politicians then in power, and in revenge he enlists the unwilling services of a member of one of his client families. Lal Muhammad works as a cook in the Mayfair house of a former Viceroy of India, Lord Caerlaverock, who had coincidentally rejected Ram Singh's appeal for justice. (David Daniell suggests that this character is based on Lord Curzon, also a former Viceroy and in 1909 suffering a nadir in his career [Daniell 1975: 23].) The Singh family have a secret recipe for a substance that will remove a victim's inhibitions, and this is introduced to the ingredients of the famous Caerlaverock curry, served at a political dinner at which the narrator is present. Also present are Abinger Vennard, the Liberal Secretary of State for India who had also offended Ram Singh, who affects the manner of a 'pre-Raphaelite attorney' (Buchan 1910b: 66); the unctuously repulsive Home Secretary Mr Cargill (whom Buchan's biographer Janet Adam Smith asserts was based on the then Lord Advocate, Alexander Ure: Adam Smith 1985: 181); an elderly and irascible cabinet minister Lord Mulross; and Miss Claudia Barriton. She is a young lady of position who is unsuitably besotted with Mr Vennard instead of with the more eligible Tommy, Lord Deloraine, who is devoted to her despite all discouragements, but follows the wrong, Conservative, politics.

These four characters eat some of the curry at dinner, all in a spirit of bravado or self-aggrandisement, after which their personalities undergo a violent change. Miss Barriton's case is the least serious, since she

promptly falls out of love with Vennard, accepts Tommy Deloraine's proposal the next day, and disappears from the story. The three Liberal politicians alarm the company by exhibiting a complete change in their political views, and depart the dinner with the full intention of shaking things up in Parliament. Lord Mulross begins to talk about giving the German Chancellor a flea in his ear over the Bosnian question (this is at the height of anti-German inflammatory remarks in the popular press: see Appendix, item 15). He is neutralised by a fortuitous and non-fatal taxi accident, but Cargill and Vennard go on the rampage, ideologically speaking, for two weeks. Vennard's final, outrageous piece of policy-on-the-hoof proposes to relocate Indian labourers to Africa to solve a labour shortage. Ram Singh, seeing 'his native province stripped of its people, his fields left unploughed, and his cattle untended' (Buchan 1910b: 87) decides to administer the antidote in a second curry. The three free-thinking politicians return to the anti-Imperialist, Liberal fold: order is restored with no adverse repercussions.

Related by a pompous narrator, 'A Lucid Interval' is a Chestertonian comedy of revenge (see Appendix, item 16). Its supernatural element—the secret ingredient that will alter the ingester's temperament—recalls the traditional tale as well as Buchan's earlier experiments in the fantastic in stories such as 'No-Man's Land' (1899), 'The Watcher by the Threshold' (1900), and 'The Outgoing of the Tide' (1902). The reader anticipates that the story will follow traditional narrative routes, containing lessons on human behaviour, even as it disrupts the conventions of a dinner party and ordered society. Ahmed al-Rawi notices that 'colonial and foreign relations are the target of the satire' (al-Rawi 2009: 122), but it is also evident that smugly settled political attitudes at home are under threat. The ease with which party politics can accommodate the ludicrously altered views of these Liberal politicians serves as a satire as much on Imperialism as Liberalism.

The story was written while the Liberals were in government (1905–1915), something that reinforces the Conservative reading from an Imperialist position (see Appendix, item 17). The timing of the story's publication and writing is significant. The general election of 1909 was crucial both for imperial and domestic politics, having been sparked by the constitutional crisis of the People's Budget but also following two previous elections in which empire had played a key role: the so-called 'Khaki Election' of 1900 in which the Tories had mobilized the Boer

War for their own ends (see Appendix, item 18), and the 1905 'Chinese Slavery' election in which the Liberals had sought to turn a scandal over the use of Chinese labourers in South Africa into a populist electoral ploy (Grant 2005: 98-99). Buchan explicitly uses this notorious event in 'A Lucid Interval' as the *deus ex machina* to bring the farrago of events to a close.

Buchan patterned his narrative style on Kipling's flattering suggestion of assumed knowledge in the reader, and on his use of muted farce: when Claudia Barriton eats a mouthful of curry for the first time, she must immediately gulp down two glasses of water. More personal to Buchan's own comic style are his merciless attacks on the self-aggrandisement of the Scottish Presbyterian minister, and the self-absorption of the politician on the rise. The details that Buchan drops into his narrative are telling. David Daniell notes that 'the unobtrusive breadth of reference shown in incidental detail is typical of Buchan's characteristically wide canvas. The confidence of the narrator flatters the reader into a sense of sharing the understanding of hidden matters, by means of a clarity of fine detail about local Indian politics, House of Commons procedure and much else' (Daniell 1975: 23).

As a rather inane conversational gambit to gain her attention and approval, Tommy Deloraine protests to Claudia Barriton that he would become a Doukhobor to please her. This now forgotten term is a topical reference to the responsibilities of Empire, as well as a throwaway line to please the anti-Imperialist Claudia (USCC Doukhobors, Report of the Royal Commission 1912 and see Appendix, item 19). The Doukhobors' opposition to integration in the Russian Empire is precisely what Claudia would admire, hence Tommy's hopeful and topical reference to their cause. In response, Buchan shows how his characters are all, openly or inherently, in favour of the Empire and its aims, no matter what they might choose to say for the sake of their public position. Although Claudia is in the throes of 'platonic admiration' of Vennard anti-Imperialist stance (Buchan 1910b: 64) she nonetheless quotes Kipling (see Appendix, item 20): 'she said something about the inability of the Ethiopian to change his skin' (Buchan 1910b: 63-4). This betrayal of a deep knowledge of 'How the Leopard got his Spots' (1901) from the *Just-So Stories* is a comment on Claudia herself as well as on Tommy: she is as truly Conservative as he is, and is simply denying her true nature by dabbling so ignorantly with politics, and attempting to widen



her sphere of interests. She will be restored to her true nature by the doctored curry.

The moral of 'A Lucid Interval' is that political opinions are chosen deliberately, and can be suppressed for personal reasons. Politicians see all sides of the question but choose one side as a function of their 'temperament, environment, necessity, and interest' (Buchan 1910b: 88), which denotes their party allegiance. As such the story must be understood as embedded in contemporary ructions between the Conservatives and Liberals over 'tariff reform, peasant proprietorship, and South African confederation' (Porter 2004: 235). After the Boer War, pro-Imperialist leagues and other propagandist organisations emerged in Britain as popular agitations to quell anti-Imperialism. It was to this political atmosphere that Buchan returned as a trained Imperial advocate and to this market that he hoped to sell *The African Colony* and *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. By positioning the plot of 'A Lucid Interval' as a whimsical, amusing clubland squib, Buchan sought to mock Liberalism as a mental delusion that might be remedied by a magical pill—or the adoption of Tory thinking.

Buchan uses this story to represent Imperialism as a project in which knowledge equates to ownership, but in this case, he shows that the narrative, pro-Empire, Tory view is the natural and correct one. Edwardian-era Tory Imperialism for Buchan meant devolving a limited amount of power to regional authorities on the ground (the importance of the local man again) while reserving for the Crown and its government the right to make strategic policy decisions. By asserting the necessity of local knowledge and experience for administrative competence and understanding, Buchan advances the rights of ownership by Empire. By making Vennard the off-message Liberal utter some very Tory tenets, Buchan impresses upon the reader the rightness of Tory Imperialism and the wrongness of Liberalism, whose exponents secretly acknowledge the former's sense while refusing to admit it publicly. 'A Lucid Interval' thus develops the suggestion noted earlier, that the association of 'civilisation' with Imperial values makes anti-Imperialist thinking a form of anarchism. In effect, it stages these anarchistic views in the heart of the political establishment as a way to show their effect on the Imperial project as a whole.



By setting the story within 'one hectic fortnight', Buchan puts limits on the tale and increases the suspense. The events in the story, as yet unknown, are reported as having 'tinged the soberest newspapers with saffron, drove more than one worthy election agent to an asylum, and sent whole batches of legislators to Continental cures' (Buchan 1910b: 57). The reader now knows that politics and public knowledge are the milieu. Buchan goes on to locate the story within the Establishment: the narrator, the nephew of Lady Caerlaverock, attends 'two remarkable dinner-parties' (Buchan 1910b: 57). He relates how he has collected details of the story from his aunt, who has confided in him, and from the gossip of a servant. Buchan carefully separates the narrative voice from the servant's racist remarks: an important distancing device. The final link to connect the evidence comes from the narrator's brother, acting as the 'expert friend' (see Macdonald 2009: 72-74) by making a coincidental connection between the Ram Singh family secret and the 'hectic fortnight'.

The narrative tone throughout is part-stuffy, part-satirical, suggesting a supportive familiarity with the Establishment characters in the plot. Buchan associates the land and border disputes on the Indian-Nepalese border with the seventeenth-century disputes across the English-Scottish border. This comparison is based on aggressive raids into rival territory, of which official notice has to be taken. It also aligns England in its paternalistic rule over Scotland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with colonial power in both India and Scotland. In this world view, the rebellious Indians acquire cultural merit with the Scottish readers of *Blackwood's Magazine* by being aligned with the Scots. Ram Singh is obedient to the law, but independent. He shows respect for the Imperial legal system by going through the correct procedures, but if he does not agree with its judgement he will take his own measures. The narrator suggests that Ram Singh's willingness to apply non-legal means to gain the judgement he wants, like his revenge for the personal insults from Vennard and Caerlaverock, evince an admirable strength of character.

In contrast, Buchan is sharply critical of the political class whose arrogance is mocked by the narrative: 'A certain kind of political success gives a man the manners of an actor, and both Vennard and Cargill bristled with self-consciousness. You could see it in the way they patted their hair, squared their shoulders, and shifted their feet to positions

loved by sculptors' (Buchan 1910b: 66). Vennard—a character possibly based on Lloyd George, who was prominent in British politics in 1909 as President of the Board of Trade (Daniell 1975: 23)—holds views on Indian politics that are deliberately presented as obtuse. Thus he disdains the experience of the former (Tory) Secretary of State for India:

'He attacks me, of course. He says he has lived forty years in India—as if that mattered! When will people recognise that the truths of democratic policy are independent of time and space? Liberalism is a category, an eternal mode of thought, which cannot be overthrown by any trivial happenings. I am sick of the word 'facts'. I long for truths.' (Buchan 1919b: 66)

This speech, which occurs during a dinner-party conversation, presents a fine example of ignorance and self-regard in a government minister who should be listening to those with first-hand knowledge, rather than blindly applying a theory. As we will see, later in the story Vennard shows that he is quite capable of holding the opposite point of view. The flaw in his character, as the Conservative narrator and author would have us see, is that Vennard, knowing both sides of the situation, knowingly chooses to adopt the more damaging.

Under the influence of the drug, Vennard starts to advocate devolving Imperial responsibilities for individual cases to the Indian Government because the latter knows the local conditions (a factor he has hitherto scorned). He then proposes to make a House of Commons speech criticising the former Secretary of State for India and blaming him for the current mess. Mulross and Cargill similarly carry out astounding revisions of political allegiance, but they have been, as noted above, removed from the action. Buchan keeps a tight control on this story, in which he could have succumbed to describing the mayhem of a government where the leading politicians all change character and abandon party discipline. The plot is firmly focused on Empire, using the examples of India and local administrative autonomy. Buchan enjoys showing how the newspapers of the day can be persuaded to print anything, no matter what the facts are, and to create plausible explanations as to why a respectable politician has begun to worship the gods of his enemies in public.

From Vennard's political exuberance emerges a *deus ex machina* that brings about a resolution of the chaos. Still improvising enthusiastically on Imperial theory, he makes a proposal for relieving

unemployment in India and solving the shortage of labour in Africa by shipping an Indian workforce to Cape Town. This, we are shown clearly, is an ignorant application of the use of Empire and its resources, and refuses to take into account the local knowledge that Vennard has been advocating, as a Tory in all but name, as essential. Thus he has not gained (proper, Tory, Imperial) knowledge, he has only demonstrated the need for knowledge to inform his opinions.

Malcolm Baines adds an important biographical point, as a final detail in our understanding of Buchan's motivations: 'Up until about 1910, it was possible for Buchan's political friends to imagine him standing for either of the main parties', since he had close friends and family who were Liberal, as well as Conservatives (Baines 2014: 8). Buchan's parents had transferred their political allegiance to the Unionists after Gladstone's behaviour over Gordon at Khartoum in the 1870s (see Appendix, item 21), and in support of Ulster Protestants when Gladstone changed his mind over Irish Home Rule (Buchan 1940: 248; and see also Appendix, item 22). Buchan chose Conservatism at Oxford, and his fiction naturally promotes the Conservative, Imperialist view.



'A Lucid Interval' can be read as an investigation into the ethics of Imperial politics, and the essentially feudal basis for Imperial power relationships, of which Buchan approved, but which today is one of the principal objections to Imperialism as system of governance. The sudden changing of the minds of his Liberal characters under the influence of the disinhibiting curry is a glorious political joke, as well as illustrating how individual political beliefs—who should hold power—must accommodate artificial party-political ideologies that do not always map perfectly onto the human spirit. Buchan's use of humour undercuts the extremes of ideological arrogance that he assigns to the Liberal politicians speaking in Conservative mode: in their arrogance the men bandy about phrases as expressions of their own power and position without truly comprehending what they are saying. Since the temporarily transformed characters can so blithely sound legitimate while advocating both sides of the same political point, Buchan is asserting that it is these personalities who are wrong, unfit for modern politics, and certainly unfit for the administration of Empire (hence the Liberals' condescending

treatment of Ram Singh). The reader is presented with two sets of opposing views in the same characters and asked to choose—but not between these inadequate and laughable individuals. While the focus for most of the story is on the white administrators who fail at their job because they simply don't know enough about their subject, the real power in the story belongs to the man who can control what they say.

Although Buchan critics have largely ignored Ram Singh, his character has agency and pursues a personal agenda that is unconnected with his relations with those in power. This is a kind of postcolonial iteration of the Bechdel Test,<sup>2</sup> which would require that a text includes two or more non-white characters who share dialogue that is not about white rule, or their subjection to it. The white men so affected by Ram Singh's actions never know of his existence or the full truth of their own stupidity and arrogance, as Buchan states so pointedly at the beginning of the story. Thus Buchan shows the reader that questions of Empire are not merely exercises in administrative paper-pushing in the centres and apex of power. They are crucial for the individual man on the ground, and his relations with his neighbours, in land agreements and in bonds of fealty. They are part of the Imperial project (inadvertent or unwilling) as much as their rulers, and this needs to be fully understood for what Imperialism meant and means to Buchan's Edwardian readers. As such, 'A Lucid interval' can be used to illustrate how the literary theoretical issues of explaining literary technique, plot structure and modes of reading (through whose eyes are we seeing the story unfold?) as a template for teaching the short story, the Edwardian social context, and the use of satire in political commentary. Buchan's imperial short fiction can thus be read alongside that of Kipling and the earlier Victorian novelists of Empire. His particular interest in exposing human failings and intellectual dishonesty chimes strongly with Kipling's interests, while reinforcing the Victorian cultural values that had produced British Imperial fiction as a new popular mode at mid-century.

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<sup>2</sup> Devised by Alison Bechdel in 1985, this test measures whether a film contains at least one scene in which two named female characters hold a conversation on any subject other than men.

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*Appendix 1. Recommended online resources for teaching Buchan and the short story*

1) The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals: Bibliography

<http://rs4vp.org/bibliography-2/>

This searchable bibliography allows you to search for information on aspects of Victorian fiction publication in periodicals such as *Macmillan's Magazine* and *Blackwood's Magazine*.

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=blackwoods>

This is the Internet Archive for all digitised issues of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

2) Edward VII as the King-Emperor of India

<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/coronation-king-edward-vii>

This source gives an indication of how Edward VII was presented to the Indian peoples as their Emperor, with a bibliography for further investigation.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKF\\_lie2Wc8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKF_lie2Wc8)

Watch the film footage of his coronation, with displays by British and Indian troops.

3) Civil administration in India during the Edwardian period

Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian relations in colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

4) Aestheticism

<http://www.oscholars.com/>

Search the site of The O Scholars for journal articles on aspects of Aestheticism in literature and in the fine arts.

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/a/aestheticism/>

This link from the Victoria & Albert Museum focuses on the fine arts, with many subsidiary links and resources.

<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/aestheticism-and-decadence>

This link from the British Library concerns Aestheticism in the literature of the period.

5) Muscular Christianity

[http://www.infed.org/christianeducation/muscular\\_christianity.htm](http://www.infed.org/christianeducation/muscular_christianity.htm)

This link from the scholarly wing of the YMCA discusses the origins and manifestations of this late-19<sup>th</sup>-century movement.

<http://history.msu.edu/hst324/files/2013/05/muscular.pdf>

This pdf article is available freely online: Nick J. Watson, Stuart Weir and Stephen Friend, 'The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond', *Journal of Religion and Society*, 7 (2005).

6) Buchan's early book covers

See Appendix 2.

7) Sir Walter Scott

<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/>

Use this extensive online resource from Edinburgh University Library to explore the subject of Scott.

8) Neil Munro

<http://www.neilmunro.co.uk/>

The Neil Munro Society is the main online resource for all things Munro.

9) *The Yellow Book*

<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-yellow-book>

This British Library link allows you to view the pages of an early edition of this short-lived but phenomenally influential literary periodical.

10) Thomas Nelson & Son

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/crc/collections/special-collections/rare-books-manuscripts/rare-books-directory-section/thomas-nelson>

This page from Edinburgh University Library describes Thomas Nelson & Son's business.

11) *The Living Age*

<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/l/livn/livn.html>

Browse this online resource of all issues of *The Living Age* up to 1900.

12) *The Atlantic Monthly*

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/backissues/>

The online archive of *The Atlantic Monthly* allows you to browse all back issues for articles. However, these are reformatted into a modern digital typeface, and are not digitised or available in their original layout.

13) 'An Imperial Club for London'

See Appendix 3. The full text of Buchan's article is reproduced, with scholarly notes by Roger Clarke.

14) Cecil Rhodes

Look at the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* for an excellent summary of Rhodes' life and influence.

15) Anti-German inflammatory remarks in the popular press

Look at I F Clark (ed.) *The Great War With Germany, 1890-1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), for texts and discussion of this bizarre period of populist literary creativity.

16) G K Chesterton

<http://www.chesterton.org/who-is-this-guy/>

The American Chesterton Society offers many resources for exploring the life and comic influence of this British writer.

17) The Edwardian Liberal Party administration

David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party since 1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

18) The 'khaki' election of 1900

<https://prezi.com/oco5pfxlgrm/the-khaki-election-1900/>

An excellent OA presentation in Prezi on the 'khaki' election, by Fleur Elkerton (2014)

19) The Doukhobors

<http://www.usccdoukhobors.org/about.htm>

The history of this remarkably little-known sect is described in this website.

20) Rudyard Kipling

[http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/bookmart\\_fra.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/bookmart_fra.htm)

This invaluable online guide to the publication details, and in many cases notes on the text, for all Kipling's fiction, is made available by the Rudyard Kipling Society.

21) Gladstone and General Gordon at Khartoum

Fergus Nicoll, *Gladstone, Gordon and the Sudan Wars: The Battle Over Imperial Intervention in the Victorian Age* (Pen & Sword, 2013)

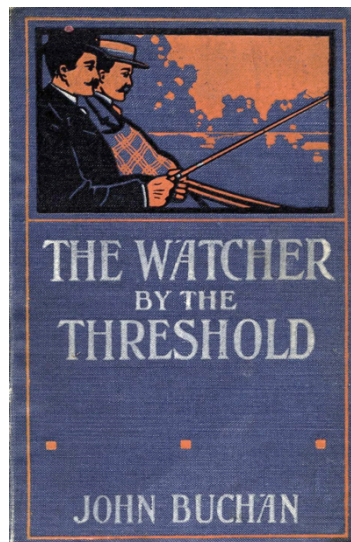
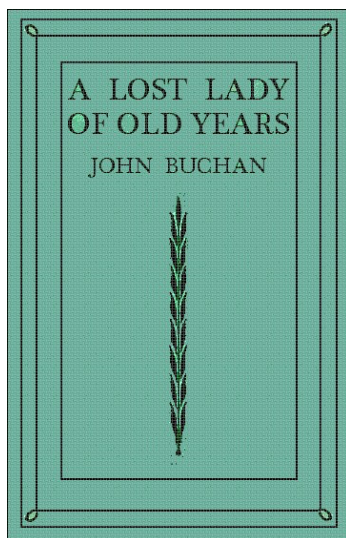
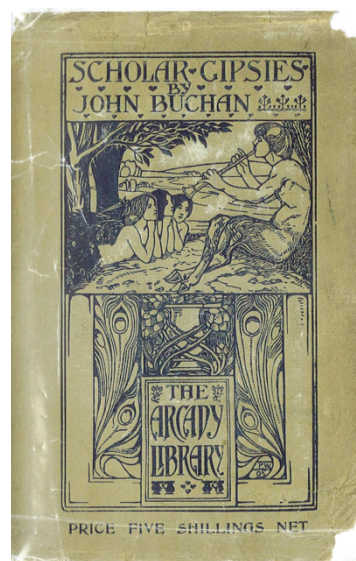
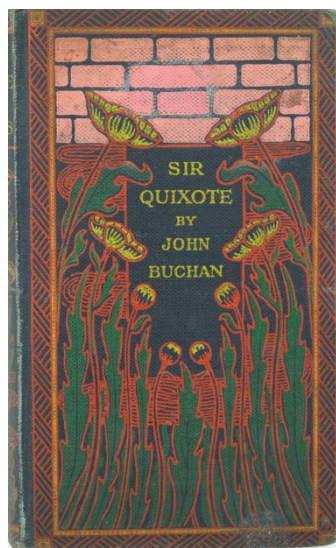
22) *Gladstone and Home Rule*

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/ireland-1845-to-1922/gladstone-and-ireland/>

This site gives resources and detail on this crucial point of Victorian political history.

*Appendix 2. Early Buchan cover art*

Covers of John Buchan's early works *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895), *Scholar Gypsies* (1896), *A Lost Lady of Old Years* (1899), and *The Watcher by the Threshold* (1902), that show the fin de siècle fashion for Art Nouveau and Aesthetic motifs, typefaces and design.



*Appendix 3. John Buchan, "An Imperial Club for London" (1903)*

This article was originally researched and written by Dr Roger Clarke, formerly of the University of the West of England, who has given permission for its use here as a pedagogical resource. For citations, please use this style:

Roger Clarke, *John Buchan's Uncollected Journalism. A Critical and Bibliographic Investigation. Appendix: Annotated Articles* (PhD thesis, University of the West of England, 2014)

**'An Imperial Club for London'** *Spectator* 91 (14 November 1903): 802-03. Headnote

In October 1903 Buchan returned to Britain from South Africa, where for two years he had been Private Secretary to the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, and had been closely involved in the reconstruction of South Africa after the Boer War. He had gone there to serve the Empire as a 'passive, unthinking imperialist' (Kruse 66), but Milner's enthusiasm and faith in Britain's imperial role had inspired Buchan, and he returned as a committed imperialist with a positive belief in the British Empire and its civilising mission (Kruse 66; Smith, *Biography* 133). In the years that followed Buchan took every opportunity to promote his imperialist ideas in his journalism (see for example **H42**, **H53**, and **H65**), and to defend Milner's reconstruction work against its critics (see in particular **H62**).

This article begins that process and is among the first that Buchan wrote when he resumed work for the *Spectator* on his return. Its opening observation that the 'air is thick with Empire and the rumours of Empire' (line 1) refers to the various schemes which were being discussed at the time to improve the organisation of the Empire in the light of both the weaknesses which had been exposed by Britain's military difficulties during the Boer War and the wave of anti-imperialist sentiment which the war had generated. One such scheme was for a constitutional federation which would impose an Imperial Cabinet or Council at the head of the Empire. Buchan had initially supported this idea because Milner was one of its chief promoters, but now he was gradually coming to the belief that attitudes had to change before federation or any other form of common government was possible. People had first to feel themselves to be

citizens of the Empire, travelling readily from one country to another to live and work (Kruse 85-86). The article proposes an Imperial Club for London as one way of facilitating such a change of attitude and as a step towards 'that practical consolidation of the Empire which must precede any Constitutional experiments' (lines 87- 88). Buchan's views on the need for a deeper mutual knowledge and understanding between England and its colonies were supported in a book written by an Australian visitor to England which Buchan reviewed for the *Spectator* in December 1905 (G26).

An Imperial Club in exactly the form suggested by Buchan was never set up, although an Over-Seas Club and League was established in 1910 by Evelyn Wrench with the object of bringing Englishmen and Colonists closer together. Buchan mentions this over thirty years later in his review of Wrench's autobiography, his last article for the *Spectator*, in March 1934 (C127). In this Buchan recalls first meeting Wrench in (he thinks) 1904, when they had similar views on imperialism and formed a lasting friendship. Wrench later became editor of the *Spectator* (1925-32) in succession to St Loe Strachey (ODNB 28 February 2013). His Over-Seas Club continues to this day as the Royal Over-Seas League, with club houses in London and Edinburgh and representation through branches or reciprocal clubs in more than ninety countries (3 September 2012 <<http://www.rosi.org.uk>>).

#### AN IMPERIAL CLUB FOR LONDON

- The air is thick with Empire and the rumours of Empire, and it becomes those who are chary about certain popular methods of union\* to ask themselves if nothing can be done in a humble way to further an end which they desire as ardently as any one else. To those who know the Colonies and the way in which their people look at things it must seem a pity
- 5 that there are not more facilities for that social union which is as important as the political, and comes home more closely to the ordinary man. An Australian or South African coming to England for the first time looks forward to his visit with eager anticipation. Do not let us imagine that he is impressed with the material greatness of the British Isles; he probably thinks of them as half-decaying States; he fancies his own commercial undertakings far
- 10 superior to theirs; and we have heard of educated Colonists who imagined that grass might be growing in the streets of London. But he is full of magnificent and generous ideas about the British race, and he is anxious to see its cradle, for to him historical memories have a quite remarkable reality. If he does not idealise us in many things, he is very prone to idealise the charm of a long-established society, and a land where history has concrete
- 15 forms, - that history in which he and his fellows have a part. He arrives in London eager to make the most of his time. Perhaps he has shown, in the ready way of our oversea peoples, much hospitality to certain wandering Britons, and has been warmly invited to give them a chance of returning it. He hunts up his friends, and finds them immersed in

their own affairs, and unable to show him more than a few perfunctory civilities. The whole atmosphere is changed. It is a country where the social organisation does not readily admit a stranger. He finds no sign anywhere that England considers himself and his land of any great importance. He goes to the Mother of Parliaments, and hears long debates on London Education Bills or Irish Land Bills, and perhaps has the pleasure of seeing the Government, which has the administration of the whole Empire in its hand, shipwrecked on some local question. Is he to be blamed if he feels that Britain is an exclusive, self-contained community, to which the Colonies are tagged on as dependencies? And so in the end, thoroughly disillusioned, he wanders from his hotel to the music-halls and back again, counting the days till he can return to a more hospitable place. The only club for the Colonies is the music-hall and a few of the big hotels. There an Australian may meet another Australian, or find some one to talk to who is not shackled by the bonds of British etiquette.

This is hardly an over-coloured picture, and the danger of such a state of things is that in the long run it will impair those ties of sentiment and kinship to which we publicly attach so much importance. No one who knows the ready hospitality of the Colonies but must regret that we cannot, as things now stand, repay it in kind. They do not ask much, but they ask something, and that something we cannot give them. There is one expedient which would remove much of the difficulty. Institutions such as the Imperial Institute\* are very good things in their way, but they do not provide that genuine social meeting-ground of Englishmen and Colonists which would go far towards solving the problem. What is wanted is a club, a first-class club, with a good situation and the best management, to which all good Colonial clubs should be affiliated. We do not want a little building in a back street, but a handsome clubhouse in the centre of London. So far as concerned its British membership, it would be as select as any good London club, - a kind of Colonial Travellers',\* which would contain all who were interested in the Colonies or who had travelled in them. All respectable clubs in the Colonies, in India, and in other parts of the Empire would, on application and the payment of a small fee, be affiliated to it, and their members on leaving for England would be given a certificate of membership which would entitle them to the use of the Imperial club. In the Colonies clubs are more democratic than at home, and such an arrangement would provide for all the better classes in any Colonial community. An Australian arriving in England would be able, on payment of a small establishment charge, to have a bedroom in the club and to make use of it as a hotel. There would be a room set apart for each Colony, to which local trophies would be sent, and in which a good library of local interest and all the local papers would be found. A man from Jamaica or from South Australia would go to the West Indian or South Australian room, and make sure of finding the latest news from his country and meeting any of his countrymen who happened to be in town. He would also meet the large and growing class of Englishmen who are more interested in the things of the Empire than in the gossip of Mayfair or Newmarket, and he would learn to realise what he still dimly believes, - that behind the stolidity of the average Briton there is a real sense of Imperial brotherhood and a genuine love of the new world which his kinsmen have created. In such a club there would be one stringent rule. Among members there would be no need for introductions, but a man would speak to his neighbour as if he had known him for years.

An Imperial Club would cost a considerable sum to start, for no expense would have to be spared in equipment and management. But in a little time it would more than pay its way, and its political value should make any capital outlay seem small in comparison. The Colonies would readily appreciate the advantage of having a place, endowed, so to speak, with extra-territoriality, a Consulate for the whole Empire, where they could feel that they were not strangers in an alien society. But the benefits to Englishmen would not be less



great. If a man wanted first-hand information on any Colonial question, he would only  
 70 have to go down to the club and get it from the first native of the Colony in question. If a  
 politician wanted to keep in touch with Colonial feeling, not as transmuted through the  
 medium of despatches and newspaper reports, but the real article, he would only have to  
 frequent the club a little more than usual. It would be impossible for this or that statesman  
 to pose as a specialist in Colonial opinion, for we should all come to be specialists. How  
 75 much pleasanter, if one wanted to make a hunting trip to the Zambesi or to British  
 Columbia, to go down to the club and take the advice of some old Rhodesian back for a  
 short holiday, or a Canadian who knew every corner of the Selkirks.\* How valuable would  
 be the views of citizens of new commonwealths even upon purely English questions, and  
 how inestimable the chance of collecting and focussing Colonial opinion on Imperial  
 80 problems. The members would go back to their own lands with a pleasant memory of  
 England as a place where all the Colonies could resort for discussion, and guidance, and  
 hospitality. The Englishman at home would have his horizon enlarged, and if he were a  
 politician, he would learn much of the practical effect of policies which to him are still  
 arguments on paper, but to the Colonies are insistent problems of their daily life. The  
 85 scheme, as we have said, would require a substantial sum of money to start it; but, in the  
 absence of a public-spirited and Imperialist millionaire, we would recommend it to the  
 consideration of those who desire that practical consolidation of the Empire which must  
 precede any Constitutional experiments.

At any rate, it is impossible for "the common objector" to produce his usual formula, and  
 90 say that it is "a delightful idea, but quite impracticable"; for the women of the Empire,  
 setting the men a most excellent example, have already done what we are talking about.  
 The Ladies' Empire Club in Grosvenor Street, the offspring of that most useful association,  
 the Victoria League,\* provides for ladies a club such as we desire to see founded for men.  
 It is smart without being exclusive in the objectionable sense, and it makes its Colonial  
 95 members, of whom it already has two hundred, at once feel at home and welcome in  
 London. Why cannot men, who, after all, need a club more than women, go and do  
 likewise?

### Footnotes

**1-2** *those who are chary about certain popular methods of union*: see headnote. Here Buchan is positioning himself among those who believe that a fundamental change of attitude is required, as subsequently explained in the article, before any schemes for political union can be contemplated.

**37** *the Imperial Institute*: founded in 1886 to undertake research and related activities of benefit to the Empire, it became the Commonwealth Institute in 1958 with a mission to educate rather than to research. It closed in 2002 and its work is now carried on by a successor charity, the Commonwealth Education Trust (3 September 2012 <<http://www.commonwealth.org.uk>>).

**43-44** *a kind of Colonial Travellers'*: the Travellers Club is situated in Pall Mall. It was founded in 1819 for gentlemen who travelled abroad to provide a place where they could meet and offer hospitality to distinguished foreign visitors (3 September 2012

<<http://www.thetravellersclub.org.uk>>). Here Buchan envisages that his Imperial Club would be similar to the existing Travellers Club, but restricted to English gentlemen who had an interest in or travelled to the Colonies, or Colonial gentlemen who were visiting England.

**77** *the Selkirks*: a range of mountains in south-eastern British Columbia, named after Thomas Douglas, the fifth Earl of Selkirk, a coloniser who settled emigrants from the Scottish Highlands in Canada (3 September 2012 <<http://www.britannica.com>>).

**92-93** *The Ladies' Empire Club....the Victoria League*: the Victoria League, which continues to flourish, was founded in 1901 in reaction to the Boer War, when it was a predominantly female society which aimed to promote imperialism by strengthening the bonds between England and the self-governing Dominions. It established the Ladies' Empire Club as a meeting place for ladies visiting London from all parts of the Empire (Riedi 572,573,578). Riedi's article on the early years of the Victoria League contains a brief section on the Ladies' Empire Club which includes a quotation from Buchan's *Spectator* article (583). It also mentions that Buchan was an auxiliary lecturer for the Victoria League in its programme of Imperial education (589). Buchan himself makes further reference to the League in a 1907 *Spectator* article on women's work in colonisation (**H125**).